

FACT SHEET

First Aid for Dogs

This information sheet has been designed by Naturediet to help explain some basic principles of first aid procedures for your dog. The care given to an animal in the first few moments of an emergency situation could be the difference between life and death. For this reason all owners should be aware of some basic first aid. A small amount of knowledge could help to preserve life, prevent suffering and prevent deterioration.

Burns and scalds

Burns are injuries to the body that are caused by dry heat such as a fire, hot material or by moist heat such as boiling water, tar or oil. Certain chemicals, high voltage electricity, and extreme cold (frostbite) can cause other types of burns. Different agents may cause burns and scalds, but the signs and symptoms are very similar.

Do not touch the damaged area, as this will cause the dog more distress, instead, reduce shock by keeping the dog calm and warm, use of a blanket is preferable to a heat lamp or direct sunshine as they could cause considerable pain to the damaged areas. Offer small amounts of water to prevent dehydration.

If the wound is less extensive such as a minor scald from a boiling kettle then the first course of action must be to cool the immediate area to lessen the pain and heat in the tissues. This can be done using cold running water and ice cubes. If the scald has been caused by hot fat then it may be necessary to pour a detergent solution onto the area to loosen the fat first then follow by cold water to wash away the detergent and cool the tissues.

All burns and scalds are sterile wounds as the initial heat destroys the bacteria on the surface. It will often be the case that these wounds are so painful that your dog will not let you go near them, let alone dress them; it may therefore be necessary for a veterinary surgeon to do this under general anaesthetic. However if at all possible the area should be cleaned with sterile saline to remove any debris and the hair should be clipped away from the area. A dry burn should be dressed with a dry sterile dressing and a scald is dressed with a paraffin tulle.

Cuts

Cuts can vary in severity and can be defined as a laceration or tear. The most important first aid procedure when dealing with a minor cut is to flush out the wound with warm, sterile water to remove any debris such as dirt, gravel and sticks. The immediate area around the cut should be clipped free from hair and depending on the severity of the cut you may need to then take the dog to the vet for stitching or antibiotic treatment to prevent infection.

If bleeding is profuse the first priority is to stop it. This can be done either by direct digital pressure which involves using your finger and thumb on the wound over the bleeding point. If this is insufficient, then a pad or pressure bandage, should be used by placing a piece of gauze onto the wound and firmly wrapping a bandage around it. This is a temporary measure until bleeding stops or you can reach a vet. The bandage should be tight enough to stop the bleeding but not so tight as to occlude circulation.

Puncture wounds

These wounds are usually caused by sharp instruments, such as nails, thorns, grass seeds and sticks, though air gun pellets and teeth can cause similar wounds.

There is usually very little bleeding, and the actual skin wound will be small but this will lead to a narrow tract that penetrates deep into the tissues often causing infection.

It is important with puncture wounds that the actual wound is kept open and prevented from scabbing over; this will reduce the risk of an abscess developing. Advice should be sought from your veterinary surgeon as a foreign body or deep infection can have serious consequences.

Fractures

If your dog has fractured his leg, the signs are usually obvious as the limb will hang at a strange angle and the dog will be unable to put any weight upon it.

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A temporary splint can be made to help a dog with a fracture to the lower part of the leg by using a rolled up newspaper around it taped to prevent it moving. If the fracture has occurred higher up in the shoulder or hip however, do not attempt to splint, as the dog will naturally assume the most comfortable posture until reaching a vet.

Heat stroke

This can cause collapse and death if urgent emergency treatment is not applied.

Wet the dog thoroughly with cold water to help to bring the temperature down and place cold wet towels with ice packs around the body until the dog is calm and the temperature returns to normal.

NEVER leave a dog locked in a car or conservatory in fine weather (it does not need to be sunny for temperatures beneath glass to soar) even with the windows open, as heat stroke can occur in a number of minutes with serious consequences.

Bee and wasp stings and snake bites

Stings and bites are very common in dogs especially those who choose to play with wasp and bees and dive through the undergrowth disturbing sleeping snakes.

Signs are usually obvious as there is sudden acute pain, swelling, and your dog will appear distressed, often licking the area or pawing at the mouth. Stings in the mouth will cause the dog to salivate and can result in considerable swelling resulting in breathing difficulties.

In a normal situation keep the dog calm and prevent rushing around. Bathe the swelling with cold water and keep a careful eye that the swelling slowly subsides. If however the swelling is still increasing after an hour it is best to seek veterinary advice.

If the sting or bite is in an area, which can obstruct breathing, then veterinary advice should be sought immediately. If the dog has collapsed it may be necessary to keep the tongue forward and the airway clear to help with the breathing.

Obstructions

Obstructions are unfortunately common in some dogs, particularly young puppies that are likely to pick up, chew and swallow many different foreign articles such as socks, underwear and children's toys. When ingested they can cause either partial or complete obstruction of the gut resulting in acute abdominal pain and persistent vomiting.

There are no useful first aid procedures for this situation other than making the patient comfortable. Your veterinary surgeon will first x-ray the dog to try and identify the extent of the problem and may thereafter have to proceed with surgery to remove the article or in lesser cases allow for the item to naturally transit through the digestive system.

Fits and convulsions

Fits can vary considerably in severity. During a mild fit a dog may just act oddly for a few moments and stare into space. During a severe fit the dog may exhibit many different behaviour patterns- he may fall over on his side and go into a series of convulsions with his legs outstretched and head held back, his eyes staring and foaming at the mouth with involuntary clamping of the jaws.

The only thing that you can possibly do to help a dog that is in a fit is to move everything out of the way to prevent the dog from damaging himself whilst fitting. Turn the television, radio and lights off and calmly wait for the dog to settle and come to you. Never under any circumstances try to comfort your dog whilst in a violent fit as he is unlikely to know who you are and you may get bitten in the process.

Injured eye

An injured eye can be caused by a number of things, and you will usually notice that your dog's eye is red and sore and kept closed. Look carefully at the eye to see if there are any obvious signs of foreign bodies such as a grass seed, which has lodged itself inside the eye. It may be possible to remove the item by flushing the eye with some clean warm water though it is advisable to seek veterinary advice.

Electrocution

Unfortunately, electrocution is often seen in dogs especially young puppies, which like to chew. Some of the worst burns possible can be caused by electricity, the wounds resemble heat burns and often the cause of the injury is all too apparent.

Never touch an electrocuted dog until you are sure that the electricity supply is turned off. Sometimes an electric shock is enough to stop the heart beating and artificial respiration may be required. See resuscitation. Treat the animal for shock and treat minor burns as necessary.

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Resuscitation

Most people are aware of the techniques behind resuscitating a human and many people have enrolled in first aid courses to help them become competent should the situation arise when it might be necessary to use it. However it is often the case that owners are unaware that they can also help their pets if faced with a situation where the breathing or heart has suddenly stopped.

Breathing Stopped! DO NOT PANIC

First check the airway, remove any tight collars and open the mouth, pull out the tongue and check at the back of the throat for any obstruction. If clear, put the tongue back in the mouth and close firmly. The patient's nose is then grasped in the left hand and the right hand can be used to ensure an airtight seal along the lips, place your mouth over the nostrils and exhale until the lungs inflate this will be obvious as the dog's chest will rise. It is important to realise that a small dog will have a small lung capacity therefore will require less breath than a large dog. Breathing should be done about six times a minute or until the dog starts breathing for himself.

What if the heart has also stopped?

Place the dog on a hard surface with his right side down. Place one or both hands depending on the size of the dog on the dog's chest just behind the elbow and administer heart massage by pressing firmly and releasing at a speed of approx. 70 times a minute.

Be aware not to press too hard, as this will damage the ribs.

The breathing and heart massage should be used together with about 10 heart massages to every breath. If no success then it may be worth trying either pinching the nose or applying acupressure at the same time as the heart massage, by putting pressure over the centre of the pad in the hind feet using your thumb, and releasing after a few seconds. Both of these methods have been known to stimulate respiration.

This document is designed for first aid advice.

You should always consult your veterinary surgeon following any emergency.

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